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# Budgets Pinch Oz Music Clippers, Despite Growing Vid Production

By BLAKE MURDOCH

Sydney, Oct. 2.

Bright future, firm results but dull returns — that best sums up Australian music video production at the moment, an industry where creativity is running strong, and enthusiasm for the first St. Tropez Music Video Festival is keen, yet where poor profits — for most of Australia's clipmakers at least — dictate only a handful can afford to attend, along with a thin sprinkling of reps from kindred industries.

Musicvid is flourishing in Australia. Estimates of coin spent on clips alone this year range from $A1,000,000 to as high as $A2,000,000, while a growing number of overseas acts are coming Down Under to make their clips, cashing in on Australia's comparatively low production costs.

Although main exposure is still through tv (most nets carry at least two vidclip/music formated shows in each capital city), retail is growing, with most major homevideo video companies now regularly releasing music titles, with an eye to sales rather than rentals.

Vast majority of homevid offerings are still exports, but an increasing number of Oz bands — Midnight Oil, Split Enz, INXS, Eurogliders, Hunters & Collectors, Mental As Anything, Redgum — are currently working on, or trying to sell, longform product — either concert footage or clips joined by narrative. Such projects are financed by the bands and their diskeries for promotional benefits.

However, despite the increasing amount of coin poured into this burgeoning industry, most of Australia's 50 or so clip makers say they barely make enough to pay the bills.

The high international standards diskeries and bands demand with what clippers aver are low budgets — presently averaging $A12-15,000 per clip — plus growing competition from new clippers underselling their counterparts to break into the biz, and rising production costs, give only minimal returns on each project, the clippers say.

Indicative of this discrepancy is a list of who *isn't* going to St. Tropez — almost every major Oz clipper — because of the expense and other commitments: Kimble Rendall (who has clipped for Dragon and Cold Chisel), Larry Meltzer (Redgum and Mondo Rock), Ray Argall (Midnight Oil, Split Enz), Peter Cox (Austen Tayshus, Angels), and Richard Lowenstein (INXS, Tim Finn), who has to attend the New York Film Fest with his feature "Strikebound" while St. Tropez is on.

### Budget Gaps

Says Lowenstein, "It's about time Australian record companies realized how much time and money goes into clips. Overseas, they work on a $A30,000 budget at least; here, we work with $A10-12,000, with so much expected." Thanks to the success of "Strikebound," Lowenstein says he can now pick and choose his assignments, a position few Oz clippers can afford.

According to Ray Argall, from Melbourne clip outfit Musical Films, most clipmakers need other film-related jobs to support them while clipping. "Although clipmaking is enjoyable, the profits aren't enough to keep yourself in work for 12 months."

Neither are there the profits to attend the likes of St. Tropez, he opines. "Considering the money we make, we just can't afford to leave work for a few weeks."

Averring that St. Tropez will be first and foremost a marketplace and showcase for diskeries, vid nets, and bands, all clippers agree it could also be a potential arena to air their gripes, and clarify a clipmaker's role in the marketing of his product, and what returns/royalties he should receive.

"At the moment," says Lowenstein, "clipmakers work for a set fee and never see the clip again. It's high time they got a slice of the pie."

### Holding Tight

According to WEA Australia's a&r manager Phil Mortlock, however, diskeries aren't planning any answers. He says although most Oz clips are designed for international exposure, their primary purpose is to crack the limited Oz market.

"You just can't talk about huge budgets with every act you have," he says. "If you had international deals for international markets all the time, things might be different, although I do believe most videos can be made without the clipmaker losing the shirt off his back."

Even present budgeting and marketing is at times difficult to justify for diskeries, he notes. "It's not as though video has bought us enormous returns. It's just another method of promotion."

Most major diskeries here have entered a few clips for judging at St. Tropez, either through, or on behalf of, the production outfit behind it. Most are also relying on their overseas counterparts for representation — likewise for homevid companies — and the only Oz diskery represented will be indie Mushroom via its production arm Wired Prods., a joint venture with Communication and Entertainment L

Wired's g.m., Peter Bain-Hogg will visit St. Tropez to hustle homevid and tv sales for John McLean feature on Cold Chisel, "Last Stand," and possibly some longform product from Oz bands. He will also eye sales and distribution deals of potential longform product. The ex-Video Classic exec says St. Tropez is an indication of musicvid's enormous growth and "bodes extremely well" for the industry generally.

"It's new, so obviously everyone's treating it cautiously. We're going in with our eyes wide open, but I think it's going to be a key event in setting future standards," he adds.

Bain-Hogg will work in tandem with CEL marketing veepee Stuart Rubin, who is eyeing to buy original product that preferably has received little tv exposure in order to offer viable, new product to home dealers.

### Pitching Fare

"Last Stand's" producer John McLean, from Captured Light Productions, will also attend. Viewing the fest more as a market than showcase for clips, McLean will be hustling sales for his recent skein "Foreign Affair," a history of Oz music and its impact overseas, already pre-sold in Australia to the Nine Network.

Stephen Priest, g.m. of Enterprise Color Video, one of Australia's most productive video outfits, will be toting two recent clips for judging, "Heaven," from The Eurogliders, and Sharon O'Neill's "Power," and looking for sales of "Narara '84," footage from the three-day fest held earlier this year.

Richard Lowenstein entered his most recent clip, TNXS' "Burn For You," and some earlier work, and clipper Lucinda Clutterbuck will take her experimental piece, "Flotsam And Jetsam," to the fest for judging. One strength of St. Tropez, the two clippers note, is the non-commercial emphasis being placed on showcasing independent and innovative product.

Australia also will have two judges at St. Tropez: Donna Sutherland, who will also use the fest to tubthump "Entertainment Down Under," skein on Oz rock designed for overseas consumption, and video consultant/journalist Phil Tripp, who will wear many hats at St. Tropez, notably that of the eyes and ears of the Australian Film Commission, which has asked Tripp to prepare a report on Australia's music video industry.


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## 'Starfighter' On Deck

Hollywood, Oct. 2

MCA Home Video will release "The Last Starfighter" on videocassette Nov. 21 with a suggested price of $79.95.

The film, which generated a box office gross of about $22,000,000, will ship about two weeks after CBS/Fox Video releases "The Empire Strikes Back." That title will carry a list price of $79.98, but with a complex pricing structure that may allow for some discounting.

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**Bremen, W. Germany** — A number of shops, including a vid store, are protesting laws that force them to close at 6:30 p.m.